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Story by Denver Beaulieu-Hains

Boots & Coots oil workers assess a well at the Ramaila Oilfield in Iraq before they begin capping it.

SFC David K. Dismukes



Senior oil well specialist Bud Curtis looks over the Ramalyah Oil Fields in Southern Iraq.



PFC Mary Rose Xenikakis

# g the Oil Wells

*"We're prepared to do what's necessary to extinguish the fires, restore wells and put them back in production to help preserve Iraq's economy."*

WHILE U.S. and coalition forces continued their advance to Baghdad, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was tasked to extinguish the oil-well fires in Southern Iraq.

USACE contractors in Iraq have been working with coalition forces to assess what needs to be done to put the fires out.

"This mission gives us the chance to support our troops, ensure their safety and support our nation. It brings together civilians, reservists and active-duty military personnel into an experienced, enthusiastic Corps team dedicated to getting the job done as quickly and smoothly as possible," said the Corps' lead contractor for its deployed Forward Engineering Support Team. Because he was working in the combat zone, he asked to remain anonymous.

Denver Beaulieu-Hains works for the USACE Public Affairs Office. LTC Gene Pawlik, USACE's deputy public affairs officer, also contributed to this article.

The Department of Defense designated the Army as executive agent for implementing plans to extinguish oil-well fires and to assess the damage to oil facilities during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The Corps contracted with the Texas-based firm Kellogg Brown & Root to extinguish the fires to limit environmental damage and prevent health hazards to local residents and coalition forces.

KBR was instrumental in planning the oil-well fire-fighting mission in response to the Kuwaiti oil fires during Operation Desert Storm in 1991, said USACE officials. KBR prepared the current contingency plans for the government under the Army Field Support Command's Logistics Civil Augmentation Program.

A Texas sub-contractor, Boots and Coots International Well Control, is studying the feasibility of using a water-based system to put out the fires. Contractors also are evaluating the differences between Iraq's northern and southern oil fields, including such factors as the depth of the wells and the amount of pressure in each.

During Operation Desert Storm there were about 700 oil-well fires burning in Kuwait. Oil spills in the Arabian Gulf caused by sabotaged pipelines also posed problems, as did oil-filled trenches that were ignited in an attempt to obscure targets.

The Corps' work in Iraq will include engineering design and repair or reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, facilities operation and

PFC Mary Rose Xenikakis



Camels graze the desert around the Rumaylah Oil Fields as a blazing oil well sends flames high into the air.

product distribution, if required. USACE personnel are prepared to do what's necessary to extinguish the fires, restore the wells and put them back in production to help preserve Iraq's economy.

USACE has been supporting Operation Enduring Freedom since September 2001. More recently, it has been building barracks and training facilities for U.S. troops and the Afghan national army in Afghanistan. 